No. 11

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Well, I suppose some man is responsible," grumbled the old lady. "If you are going to be married, why don't you tell a person. I couldn't blame you. All women will be fools."

R. of M. G., No. 11.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

ALICE never took kindly to hearing Phil make complimentary remarks about another woman's good looks in her presence. To hear him mention the newly engaged governess in connection with the movies aroused her wrath to no small degree. She tossed her head contemptuously and exclaimed:

"Oh, that is just a lot of rot, Phil. How do you get that way?"

"I expected you to express yourself that way," Phil declared. "I believe you are jealous of her already. Well, you needn't worry about me, Alice. I shall keep busy at my office every day, and the nights are usually taken up with some social function in which Miss Desmond has no part."

He paused a moment, then added thoughtfully: "There is something rather strange about the girl. She reminds me of someone—especially her voice."

"Oh, does she?" Alice gave him a quick glance. "Of whom, Phil?"

"Of—Marie, my first wife," the latter said.

Alice sprang up. Every vestige of color had left her features, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"I don't thank you for mentioning your first wife's name in my presence," she exclaimed with a stamp of her foot. "I don't want to hear it again, for you know I can't bear it. I should imagine you would refrain from doing that in your own behalf. Why speak of a woman whose name spells dishonor and depravity."

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," he soothed. "It is not a good thing to do in the condition you are in."

This seemed to be the signal for Alice to break into tears. She was not the kind of a woman who looked forward to becoming a mother with any degree of joyous anticipation.

Motherhood meant to her needless suffering and an endless period of confinement.

It meant a temporary suspension of her social activities. There was that constant fear that she might not survive the ordeal, and if she did, that she would not be her former beautiful self.

"Oh, I think it is a shame that I have to go through that," she sobbed.

"Please don't talk like that," Phil reproved gently. "Just think what it means for you to hold a little human being of your own flesh and blood in your arms. Why, you'll be so happy——"

"Happy nothing!" Alice snorted. "I'll hate it. Yes, I will. I'll hate it!"

"Hush, Alice. I am ashamed of you."

Again she broke into a flood of tears, and it took poor Phil some time to coax her back into a good humor once more.

And then he succeeded only because he made her the most extravagant promises which included another trip to Europe and a diamond necklace.

But he was not quite satisfied with the way she expressed herself about the coming of the baby. How could any prospective mother say that she would hate her own child? It was unnatural.

"Now tell me!" he said after Alice had quieted down, "did you mean what you said a moment ago?"

"Said what, Phil?"

"Have you forgotten so soon?"

"What did I say? Was it something you did not approve of?" Alice's voice had a coaxing note in it. "Don't aggravate me any more, what was it?"

He looked her straight in the eyes.

"You said you'd hate the baby, Alice."

Her laugh was hard.

"Of course, I did not mean that," she protested. "And I should not have said it. Oh, I know it must have sounded terrible to you. You are so fond of children."

"I am," Gordon admitted, his handsome face soft with emotion.

"There is where you and I differ, dear," his wife retorted with a sudden pout. "Babies are such a nuisance and bother. And the mother always gets the worst of it. I don't think it is fair."

Phil frowned slightly.

"Perhaps the mother does get the worst of it," he said. "But hers is all the glory and pleasure."

Alice shook her head.

"Pleasure? I can't see where any pleasure is connected with it, Phil. And as for the glory—well, I would rather get along without it."

Alice's voice again had the old harshness in it as she uttered these words. It was fortunate that her husband did not prolong the argument, for she was fast losing her patience. She watched him leave the room, a feeling close to desolation sweeping over her.

The moment she found herself alone, her eyes took on an expression of anger.

"Why can't men be reasonable," she muttered. "It makes me sick to hear Phil talk so foolish. He has an idea that a married woman must become a slave to a lot of children. Well, I won't. I want to enjoy life. I will not have mine spoiled."

Chapter 86

THE STRANGER

PERHAPS no other woman was ever placed in a more trying, a more nerve-wracking position, than Marie was when she entered the house whose proud mistress she had been. She essayed to play the role of a stranger without counting the terrible cost. She had passed through the ordeal of standing face to face with the woman whose base deceit proved to be so disastrous to herself.

She had successfully battled down every emotion when Phil touched her hand in bringing her a glass of water. But the greatest test of her self-control was yet to come.

In a few moments she would be in the presence of her children. But how could she remain a stranger to them when every pulse of her nature yearned to crush them to her mother heart and tell them the truth?

But existing circumstances demanded that she remain firm.

She would rather have lost her life than reveal that she was their mother—the woman whom the world had condemned. What fate could have been more cruel?

Hers was the undeserved punishment that perhaps no other woman was ever called upon to endure.

It was a good thing that the servant who accompanied Marie up to the second floor appeared to be in a preoccupied mood. She did not see the constant quivering of the stranger's lips, nor did she hear the stifled moan.

"That is the nursery over there," said the girl as she paused. "You can go in and talk to the children."

"Thank you," answered Marie, glad to be left alone.

She needed a little time to compose herself. With both of her hands pressed against her fast beating heart, she staggered slightly and found the wall for support.

There she leaned and staged the last battle for her composure.

She won that chiefly because a certain degree of curiosity was mixed with her longing. It did hardly seem possible, but over a whole year had passed since last she saw her two children. No doubt they had grown.

In the midst of a maze of conjectures, Marie was startled by the sudden opening and closing of a door. That same instant she heard a childish voice. It was little Phyllis.

Unable to restrain her self, the mother reached out.

"Oh," gurgled the child as she found herself lifted into a pair of strong arms, "who are you? Are you our new governess?"

"I am," Marie admitted in a rapturous breath. "I was sent up here to get acquainted with you, you sweet little darling. I hope you will learn to love me very much."

Phyllis did not struggle.

She seemed quite content to rest in the arms of this new governess who held her off and gazed at her so strangely. Neither did she object when a soft pair of lips were pressed to hers.

But why had this beautiful lady tears in her eyes?

"Your name is Phyllis, isn't it?" The words smote her ears tenderly. "Your mother told me. And you have a brother by the name of Harry. Won't you take me to him? I am awfully anxious to see him."

"I will," Phyllis agreed quickly. "If you let me

down, I'll show you the room."

Before Marie relinquished the little girl, she kissed her again and again. Just then a door to the left opened and a young woman dressed in the garb of a nurse stepped out.

Marie nearly forgot herself when she recognized her. It was Annie.

It required all of her self-possession to look into the honest face of her former servant and loyal friend without betraying herself. Annie, in turn, stared at the strange woman whom she had seen kissing and fondling little Phyllis.

Who was she? And how dared she take such an unwarranted liberty?

The momentary silence was intense. Marie, quickly regaining her usual calmness, was first to speak.

"I am Miss Desmond, the new governess," she explained hurriedly and gulping down her emotion. "And you are Annie, I believe, aren't you? Mrs. Gordon spoke to me about you."

At the sound of the new governess' voice, Annie changed color.

The expression of wonder on her features changed to perplexity. She was too confused for the moment to find a suitable reply.

"Since I have met you and little Phyllis here," Marie went on with a smile, "I would also like to meet the boy—Harry. Will you take me to him?"

In silence Annie led the way to the nursery.

And now came the worst and the most dreaded ordeal for the sorely tried young mother.

When she left home Harry had been in the best of health. He was her first-born and had always been the darling of her heart. How would she find him now?

Through subterfuge and deception only would she

be able to gain access to his sick-bed, though by every law of nature she had the moral right to be there. Ah, how her heart beat.

For a moment she could not get her breath.

Then Annie opened the door to the nursery and stepped aside to allow Miss Desmond to enter. The girl cast a curious glance at the face of the new governess as the latter passed, leading Phyllis by the hand.

Lying on his white bed, pale and thin, a hectic flush on his cheeks, lay the boy for whom the wretched mother's heart had been yearning.

There was something so unspeakably sad in the expression of the large dark eyes: in the emaciated face upon which death already seemed to have set its seal, that Marie could not repress a low, agonized cry.

When she saw his eyes resting on her in questioning surprise, she strove with every atom of her reserve strength to master her emotion.

"You are Harry, aren't you?" she asked in a soft, tremulous voice.

The boy smiled wanly and gave a slight nod.

"I am your new governess," the heart-broken mother went on, not able to keep back the tears. "Your mother tells me that you are not well. I am going to nurse you back to health. And when you are well and strong again, you and I will play and study together, won't we?"

Again the boy smiled—a wan, pitiful smile that pierced Marie's soul.

"I—I want to get well," was his low answer. "And I want to learn a lot. But I am afraid it will take a long time before I can study. I have such pain in my chest and I always feel so tired. Do you think you can make me well?"

"With God's help, yes," the mother said, allow-

ing her tears to flow. "You see, God can do all things, and will if we ask it in the right way."

Little Harry's large, unnaturally bright eyes looked at her wistfully.

"I always say my prayers every morning and every night," he replied, checking a cough. "I wonder sometimes if God hears them. I try to be a good boy and I take my medicine, although it is so bitter."

Marie could not have spoken another word without breaking down completely.

A desperate struggle was going on within her. She wanted to take her dearly beloved boy in her arms, to kiss him and cry over him. But she dared not give way.

Cool reason prevailed at last, and she contented herself with breathing a tender kiss upon the little patient's brow.

As Marie straightened up and looked around, she saw Annie standing a few paces away, her face bathed in tears, which she dried with the corner of her apron. For some little time these two women confronted each other.

Then Annie wavered, an unspoken question in her eyes, and quitted the room.

Marie's heart throbbed wildly. Had Annie recognized her? Heavens, anything but that! Not a soul in the house must ever suspect that she was the former Mrs. Gordon, or she could not remain.

Little Phyllis was nestling close to the side of the new governess at this moment. She looked up eagerly.

"Are you going to stay with us?" she inquired directly.

"Not right away, you darling," Marie answered as she stooped and kissed those sweet young lips. "I'll be gone for a few days, and then, when I come back, I'll

stay."

"Will you stay all the time? You will never go away again?"

"No, I shall never go away again, Phyllis."

"Oh, I am so glad," the child cried. "I like you. And I'll love you if you tell me whole lots of nice stories. Do you know many?"

"I think I know quite a few," Marie responded, fighting an impulse to take the dear little mite into her arms and crush her to her throbbing bosom. I'll tell you every one of them, and then we will get some nice story books."

The child appeared to be in thought.

"Harry and I love Annie," she said suddenly.

"That is very nice, dear," said the mother. "But you should love everyone."

"We don't love Nora Evans because she isn't good to us." Phyllis proclaimed with a flash in her baby eyes. "Nora whips us and she is always so cross. But mother likes Nora."

Marie experienced an unpleasant sensation when she heard Alice referred to as "mother." What right had that selfish, cruel creature to the name? Then little Harry interrupted her unpleasant train of thought.

"Yes, Annie is good to us," he said earnestly. "I wish mother was kind like that. But she isn't. She forbids us to speak of our dead mamma—our real mamma. Mother says we must not love her any longer."

"She forbid you to speak of your dead mamma, does she?" Marie managed to say after a long moment of painful silence. "Why, Harry?"

"Well, she told us that our real mamma never loved us or she would not have gone away," the boy responded. "But Annie tells us that our real mamma was not bad and wicked. She is in heaven now, Annie says,

and her spirit is always with us. So we must always behave because spirits can see. Do you believe that?"

Marie was no longer able to hold her emotions in check. With an agonized groan she burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

"Why do you cry?" asked Harry. He sat up and was immediately shaken by a hard, dry cough.

The new governess put her arms about him and pressed her lips to his feverish cheek.

"I cry because it hurts me to see you suffer, you darling boy," she said sobbingly. "Now you must lie down again and be very quiet. You just wait until I am back to stay, and we'll soon be rid of that nasty cough."

The boy sank back obediently. The expression in his eyes betrayed that he was not satisfied with the result of his conversation.

However, before he could speak, Marie asked in a low tone:

"Do you remember your first mamma—your real mamma, Harry?"

"Oh, yes," he replied without a moment's hesitation. "She was beautiful and kind. And I don't care what mother says, I won't believe that she ever did anything bad, But," he added thoughtfully, "you did not tell me if you believe in spirits."

"As a rule I don't," said Marie, choking back a tear. "But I do believe that your real mamma's spirit will always be with you. And she loved you no doubt as no other person can. You must love her memory always, Harry. And you, too, Phyllis. Don't believe the ugly things that may be said about her."

Both children promised.

Marie took Phyllis in one arm, and with the other she embraced Harry. A feeling of indescribable ecstasy took possession of her. It was one of the happiest mo-

ments of her life when her heart-hunger was thus appeased.

She wept no longer. A great peace had come over her. She whispered a fervent prayer that her beloved boy's life may be spared.

The little girl clung to her, a stranger, with an affection she had never evinced toward anyone else. Harry seemed to breathe easier and there was a smile of contentment upon his pinched face.

Suddenly the door opened and Annie came back.

The scene she beheld surprised her. She stared at the new governess, whose back was turned. There was something about this Miss Desmond's attitude and general appearance which reminded her strongly of the first Mrs. Gordon.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said with a slight cough when the latter did not move.

"Ah, it is you, Annie," the governess cried, quickly releasing the two children. "You see, we have become quite good friends," she added with a tell-tale blush. "And I hope you and I will get along well together."

Annie remained silent for a moment. That voice —yes, that voice! It was that of her former mistress.

"I know we will," she said finally. "And you don't know how glad I am that the children have taken such an instant liking to you. God only knows how they need someone to love and care for them. I have done my best, but I am always interfered with."

"But you had complete charge of the children while I——" Marie caught herself just in time.

Another blush mantled her cheeks. "You may rest assured that there will be no more interference in the nursery after this," she went on somewhat hurriedly. "I already found out that Nora Evans is the chief offender. If she continues, I shall appeal to Mr. Gordon."

"Yes, Mr. Gordon is the only one in this house to appeal to," Annie declared. "Mrs. Gordon doesn't want to be bothered. But just the same she sends Nora Evans to spy on me, and Nora is as mean as they make them."

"Little Phyllis tells me that this Nora actually struck her and her brother," Marie said with flashing eyes.

"That has happened a number of times," the girl returned in a voice trembling with wrath. "But I believe that Mrs. Gordon is chiefly to blame. She is afraid that the children are pampered too much. She told me that I am spoiling them, and that I am ruining them with kindness."

"Does Mr. Gordon contenance this Nora Evans' brutality to his children?" the new governess inquired as she straightened up. "I should imagine he loves them all the more since they lost their real mother."

"He does love them," said Annie. "He loves them dearly. More than once I found him alone with the children and sobbing. But whenever a complaint is made about Nora, Mrs. Gordon takes it upon herself to deny it. I can't understand why these two are so intimate.

"Sometimes I am tempted to believe that Nora has Mrs. Gordon in her power. No matter what Nora Evans does, she is never called to account. But the rest of the servants in the house have to walk the chalk mark."

Marie, after giving both of the children an affectionate pat, walked to the door. She wanted a little time to frame a reply to all she had heard.

"There is apt to be a change so far as the nursery is concerned when I come back to take up this work permanently," she said in parting. "And I am depending on your cooperation, Annie."

"You will get it," the latter replied heartily. "And I want to tell you how glad I am that you were engaged,

Miss Desmond."

Marie nodded, and with an appreciative smile left the room.

She found the second Mrs. Gordon awaiting her. The conversation between them was very brief.

It was mutually agreed upon that Marie take charge of her duties as governess within two weeks. The latter at once returned to Milwaukee in order to give Mrs. Hargrave notice of leaving.

Chapter 37

A MYSTERIOUS PATIENT

DR. VAN BUREN had been the Gordon family physician for a number of years. He enjoyed the distinction of being called one of the best surgeons in the city of Chicago. While close to forty years of age, he had the enthusiasm that spells perennial youth, and as a man he was singularly attractive and pleasant.

All questions why he had never married he answered with an enigmatic smile and a shrug of his square shoulders. There was no satisfaction in that. Those who insisted upon a more definite answer were usually rewarded with a frown.

Any of his close friends would never have asked a question so personal and useless. They knew that Dr. Van Buren was disappointed in love. They knew, too, that the object of his affection had been the beautiful young miss who later became the first Mrs. Phillip Gordon.

Dr. Van Buren was a man who never lost control of his emotions. No matter how deeply hurt, he never betrayed the fact by word or look. All of his friends—and he had a host of them—respected him.

He was a man who could be safely trusted with any family secret. He was big and generous enough to relinquish the woman he loved to the man of her choice without bitterness or complaint.

Marie Carey had been his ideal of a perfect woman. But when she became Phil Gordon's wife she passed out of his life as if she were dead and buried.

Nevertheless he remained her loyal friend, and h steadfastly refused to believe that she deliberately ran off with Jack Hoover.

For a time he avoided Phil Gordon because he feared the renewal of an argument about Marie's alleged wrongdoing. But when little Harry took ill and he was called in on the case, Dr. Van Buren went in a professional capacity.

The case of the boy proved to be a baffling one, and it caused the physician no small degree of uneasiness and study.

He became aware of the fact that the second Mrs. Gordon harbored a feeling of antagonism toward him. In this he was not mistaken, for Alice had objected very strenuously when Phil suggested Dr. Van Buren.

"What is the use of having him come all the way out here from Chicago, when we can get just as good a physician right in the neighborhood," she told her husband. "I frankly admit, I never liked Dr. Van Buren. I think I ought to be considered in the matter."

A dark frown clouded Phil's brow.

"I can not allow your personal likes and dislikes to influence me, Alice," he replied rather impatiently. "Dr. Van Buren has no superior in the medical profession. And besides, I have absolute faith in him."

That ended the argument, for Alice had learned at the very outset that Phil had a mind of his own, and that it was impossible to swerve him from a set purpose.

However, she let it be known to Dr. Van Buren, that so far as she was concerned, he was not a welcome visitor. She never spoke to him when he came, nor asked a single question about the boy's condition.

It did not surprise Dr. Van Buren that the second Mrs. Gordon showed little love for her step-children. Within the last week, however, he had discovered some-

thing which decided him to keep an eye on Alice.

While he never lost his good-natured smile, a close observer would have noticed that lately it was somewhat forced. It seemed that every time he approached the sickroom, he was intensely on the alert.

And he did another thing he had never felt himself called upon to do before. He examined the various medicine bottles each day to make sure that they had not been tampered with.

Then something happened, which for a time at least, diverted Dr. Van Buren's attention from the case which had begun to worry him a great deal.

He lived in a pretentious home on Ashland Boulevard. His well regulated household was presided over by an only sister, a few years older than himself. There existed between brother and sister an affection not often seen these days.

Josephine Van Buren was a fine type of a woman to whom matrimonial ties had little appeal.

When some of her friends teased her about deliberately remaining a spinster, she would laugh and say:

"My first duty is to my brother. After he is married and needs me no longer, I might consider a husband."

It was her boast that she had everything she wanted; and having everything, she was happy. She had a considerable fortune in her own right. She had social position and a legion of loyal friends.

She was proud of her only brother whom the medical world called its leading physician.

On many occasions she went out accompanied by her brother, and she enjoyed them immensely. It seemed to add to her prestige to introduce him as the famous Dr. Van Buren.

The Chicago social season was at its height just

then, and Mrs. Palmer was sending out invitations for a ball.

Dr. Van Buren and his sister were included among the invited guests, and Josephine looked forward to the event with the most pleasant anticipations.

"I wouldn't miss that ball for the world," she told him. "I hope you'll be able to go."

When her brother did not answer immediately she repeated:

"I hope you'll be able to go, or won't you?"

"Indeed, I expect to go," Dr. Van Buren replied. "Of course, there is always a chance that I might be called out on an urgent case about the time I am dressing for that ball. However, I am hoping this won't happen."

But happen it did!

Josephine Van Buren had finished her toilet and she was waiting impatiently for her brother. Finally she went into his room and found him struggling with his bow-tie.

"Wait, let me help you," she cried, and got busy instantly.

She was anxious to be out of the house, for fear that someone would call for the doctor's services the last moment. At last the task was done. They walked down the stairs arm and arm.

In another minute they would be seated in the motor and on the way.

Dr. Van Buren opened the front door to find a ragged urchin standing there with his cap in his hand.

"Well, my boy, what is the trouble?" the physician asked.

"There is a woman sick around the corner. Here is the address." The boy displayed a piece of soiled paper. "You better come quick, doctor."

"But I can't come to-night," said Dr. Van Buren.

"I am going out with my sister. You get Dr. Clark. He lives in the next block. He is a good physician and he will take care of the patient."

"The sick lady told me to get you," replied the boy. "She don't want nobody else. She is in bad shape, doctor, and there isn't anybody with her. She called to me when I passed her door and told me to hurry."

Dr. Van Buren stood for a moment in silence as he glanced at his sister. He saw the look of impatience —of disappointment on her face.

"It may not take a minute, Josephine," he murmured. "The poor creature may be in great need."

"Alright," she agreed brusquely. "Let us hurry. It would be a shame if we had to miss Mrs. Palmer's ball. You know how I had my heart set on going. I really can't see why some other doctor could not take the case instead of you."

"That is the price we pay for being called a good physician," he responded with a patient smile. "Come."

He took his sister's arm and led her to the waiting car.

The physician glanced at the address scribbled on the paper. His face clouded for a moment.

Then he took the wheel resolutely, and fifteen minutes later he stopped before the door of a swarming tenement house in a thickly populated section of the city.

That even the most poor people called for Dr. Van Buren could not be regarded as a question mark in his standing. It was only too well known that this famous physician had often helped the needy without accepting compensation.

This case was evidently one of that kind. Josephine gave one look at the big tenement, then turned up her nose.

She wondered how her brother could go into such

a place with unconcern. There might be danger—the danger of violence and contagion. Not long ago a physician had been lured into this very district by a fake message, then robbed and brutally beaten.

Josephine Van Buren had never come in touch with the sordid side of life. She had never known poverty, and she had little sympathy for people who are content to live in filth.

Dr. Van Buren did not hesitate. He sprang out of the car and approached the man standing in the doorway.

"Where will I find this woman?" he inquired, displaying the paper with the name and address scribbled on it.

"On the third floor, back," the man told him with a peculiar grin.

The physician wasted no time. He entered the house and was lost to view.

Josephine Van Buren waited impatiently. The minutes passed swiftly. Half an hour was gone, and still her brother did not come. A few doors down the street was a saloon. Rough sounds of revelry came to her ears. Fear took possession of her.

An hour passed, and still she sat alone. The idea of her brother leaving her alone at the curb in front of a wretched tenement house at a time like this. The more she thought of it, the angrier she became.

And becoming angry, she was capable of doing things out of the ordinary.

For the time being she forgot about the Palmer Ball. She was very much afraid and she was very curious. She had a desire to see what her brother was doing.

Surely, he must have a good excuse for making her wait for such a length of time. He mind was made up quickly.

She climbed from the car, entered the dark doorway, and groped her way to the stairs. She had the way plainly before her, for she had heard the directions the disreputable looking man had given her brother before he went in.

She found the stairway and began the ascent with new fear in her heart. The hall on the second floor was dark. Her feelings were those of mingled terror and anger.

Up another flight of stairs she went, then still another. At last she reached the third floor.

Glancing down the corridor, she noticed a faint glimmer of light coming from under a closed door. That was the room the man had mentioned.

Josephine Van Buren walked toward it with an outraged feeling in her heart and hot words on her lips. She reached it and stealthily took hold of the knob. It turned easily in her grasp and she pushed the door open.

In the dim light coming from a sputtering gas jet, Josephine could not at first make out the objects in the interior of the room. Then her vision cleared, and she saw her brother at the side of a bed.

Dr. Van Buren was on his knees, with his face turned toward a recumbent figure.

She could see a look of anxiety and tenderness on his features and heard him speak in tones of deep sympathy. Josephine coughed slightly, and that instant he spied his sister.

The latter stood for a moment in doubt as to what she should do. The hot words of reproach died on her lips, and the angry thoughts vanished, for she saw that she was in the presence of something awesome.

In a flash she understood!

By instinct she knew that she was in the presence of one of the world's daily tragedies. This was the trag-

ody of a woman passing through the shadow of motherhood alone and utterly forsaken.

The thing gripped the society favorite with a strange power and made her thrill. A strange new force took a hold of her and she smothered a sob.

The picture of a brilliantly lighted ballroom faded away. She forgot that she was one of Mrs. Palmer's invited guests.

The eager haste of an hour before gave way to a great calm, and the vision of her only brother in this strange role caused her to look at him with new interest.

He had never looked so noble before. His voice was so soft and tender, and his words seemed to soothe the sufferings of the woman on the bed. This was a man she had never known before. This was a masterful man. And he was doing something which a physician of his standing and reputation was rarely called upon to do.

Glancing about the room, Josephine Van Buren noticed the evidences of poverty. No doubt this unfortunate woman was very poor.

She became accustomed to her surroundings in a little while, and looked toward the bed again with a desire to do something.

She wanted to have a part in this night's work. The cries of the woman on the bed were heart-rendering in her suffering.

An old wrapper was lying across a broken chair. Josephine picked it up and put it over her decollete ball gown. Then, without a moment's hesitation, she approached her brother. For some little time she watched in breathless silence.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked softly.

He looked at her, amazed.

"You — you mean you really want to help?" he countered.

"Yes, I want to."

"Fine," the physician approved. "Go into the kitchen and get me some hot water. Find a clean towel and bathe the poor woman's face."

Josephine lost no time in doing what her brother told her.

She found both, the hot water and the towel, and began to bathe the patient's face. It was a young face, and lovely in spite of the ravages of poverty and suffering.

"Who is she?" she asked in a whisper.

"I don't know exactly," Dr. Van Buren answered in a low tone. "The name on the paper was not written very plain. But I think it is Harding or something like that. I'll get the details from the landlord after we are through."

There was no more conversation. The suffering woman, at the constant touch of water, looked up with a wealth of gratitude in her sunken eyes. She caught a hold of Josephine's hand, and her grip savored of a sweet caress.

The physician paid no further attention to his sister except to give a command now and then which she cheerfully endeavored to fill properly.

Josephine was full of the joy of her part and took a keen delight in this new service to humanity in distress.

Finally the ordeal was over. When the cry of a strange little voice filled the room, the mother on the bed settled back in deep calm, while the other waited.

"Oh, you blessed little darling," Josephine exclaimed when her brother gave the little newcomer into her arms. "What will I do with this precious baby?"

"Care for it," Dr. Van Buren replied.

He showed her what to do, and she went about her work with zest.

Josephine experienced a strange heart throb as she handled the little body. She bathed and dressed it carefully and held it against her breast with deep longing. She was in no hurry to carry it back to the mother.

What sweet little hands and feet they were; what a dear little head, and soft clear skin. It seemed too tragic for this world—and too precious. She wondered why God did such things.

She was not irreverent, but she could not understand why she had missed all this.

It seemed that this was more valuable than all the rest that the world had to give. It was a vague something she had missed through all the years.

Nothing was so great as this love that she saw in the young mother's eyes as she laid the baby at her breast. She stood by and saw visions that were strangely sweet. She waited in silence, for she was too full for words.

Dr. Van Buren sat beside the bed with a grave expression on his face. Josephine saw that his work was not over yet.

She felt that there was a terrible silent battle going on, and she was powerless to help. Fascinated she sat and watched it until the end.

The young mother seemed to have lapsed into unconsciousness. The baby began to wail. Again Josephine took it.

"Let me take it home with me," she said to her brother. "This poor woman, even if she lives, won't be able to give it the proper care. I love it. Oh, God, how I love it."

He turned to her with a sainted expression on his features.

"That is just what I was going to ask you to do," Josephine," he said. "You are a glorious woman, and I

am proud of you."

Then Dr. Van Buren called in one of the neighbors and gave her some instructions, and incidentally he asked for the information he needed. The woman told him that the young mother had occupied these two rooms for about a month, and that her name was Mrs. Harding.

The woman appeared to be anxious to give information. She told some things the physician did not care to hear. But Dr. Van Buren listened quietly.

"I don't think the poor creature has a chance," he said in a whisper. "You stay with her and in case the worst happens, call me up at the residence of Mrs. Palmer."

Josephine who had overheard this, shook her head vehemently.

"If you are still thinking about that ball, forget it," she told her brother in a tone which left no doubt as to her intention. "I am going to stay right here and see this thing through. If the mother passes away, I shall claim the baby."

"Of course, I'll stay with you," the physician declared. "When I spoke of Mrs. Palmer's residence I was thinking of you, sister. You had your heart set upon attending that ball, and I did not want to disappoint you entirely."

"Disappoint me?" Josephine uttered a soft laugh. "Why, you have given me the greatest hour of my life. I would not take a King's ransom for the experience I had this night. You don't know the happiness I found in aiding poor, suffering humanity."

That settled the issue.

Dr. Van Buren gave the still unconscious young mother his entire attention. The baby seemed to be enjoying its first delicious sleep.

When morning came, three pale-faced people

stood with bowed heads, and their tearful eyes rested upon the tiny figure cold in death. Providence had willed that the child, and not the mother should die.

The mother, in a half fainting condition, lay with her eyes closed. She seemed to be scarcely breathing.

On her pallid features was the sorrow only cheated motherhood could express. Occasionally there was a slight movement of her hand in the direction of the cold little form lying near her.

Chapter 28

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

CHICAGO is a city in which next door neighbors frequently remain strangers. People dwelling in the same apartment building rarely mix in a social way. This is a peculiar characteristic of the big town on the lake, and the condition exists among all classes. The various suburbs may have their swell society cliques, but they don't mix.

For instance, Northside society is a thing apart from the social set on the Southside. The fashionable crowd residing on the boulevards is equally exclusive.

Dr. Van Buren and his sister belonged to the boulevard social set. The Procters claimed the Northside society supremacy, thus remaining strangers in a social way.

The reason the Gordons and the Van Burens became friends was principally due to the fact that Dr. Van Buren happened to be chosen as the Gordon family physician.

Dr. Van Buren and his sister had met Alice Procter only once or twice before she became the second Mrs. Philip Gordon. First impressions had been extremely unfavorable on the Van Buren side.

Certain society gossips continually painted Alice in colors disagreeable to the eye.

And it must be admitted that they uttered nothing but the truth. There were those who broadly insinuated that Miss Procter had done some shrewd plotting in order to replace Marie as the mistres of the Gordon home.

Neither Dr. Van Buren nor his sister had any particular desire to cultivate the second Mrs. Gordon in a social way.

But it was decreed that the physician and Alice were to meet quite frequently because Philip Gordon insisted that Dr. Van Buren treat his boy.

The feeling of antipathy existing between the second Mrs. Gordon and the doctor was marked. Alice studiously avoided meeting Dr. Van Buren when he called daily to see little Harry.

Dr. Van Buren enjoyed the trips to the magnificent Gordon summer home, for he was a nature lover.

The big house of old English architecture, the tower in the rear, the mighty oak trees which gave the place its name, and the beautiful gardens and acres of well-kept lawn, held a peculiar charm for him.

He had never envied Philip Gordon his success and wonderful possession. But he had always felt that the second Mrs. Gordon did not deserve to be called the mistress of "Oak Manor."

It was a place such as he had often dreamed of, to own and turn into a fine country asylum for those unfortunate human beings whose lives might be saved by plenty of fresh air and wholesome food.

Dr. Van Buren's noble soul had often rebelled when in his professional work he saw misery, want and actual starvation.

A recent case was that of Mrs. Harding. This young woman, now recovering from her confinement, had proven a mystery. So far, as he was able to ascertain, she had no living relatives.

She had arrived at the place where she lived one night, paid the rent for this cheaply furnished two-room flat on the third floor back, in advance, and kept to herself.

Those who attempted to befriend her received no encouragement. And so they left her severely alone.

Mrs. Harding rarely went out. Never during the day. What errands she had to do, were taken care of at night under the cover of darkness. One thing would have impressed a close observer. Whenever she saw a policeman, she began to tremble.

A week had passed since Dr. Van Buren was first called to her bedside. He had seen to it that the baby was properly buried, and he had become more and more interested in this strange young woman.

Of one thing he was sure; she did not belong in that neighborhood.

Her language was that of a cultured person. All attempts of Dr. Van Buren to persuade Mrs. Harding to talk about her past, met with signal failure.

When pinned down to the question if she had been married, or whether her child had been illegitimate, she answered with tears in her big sad eyes:

"Yes, I am married, but my husband and I became separated by circumstances over which neither of us had control."

Dr. Van Buren was an adept at reading between the lines. He sensed the sorrow and grief behind those words. This young woman was undoubtedly worthy of his sympathy and material help.

With him the alleviation of those in distress had become a fixed habit.

He had a lengthy chat with his sister, and Josephine became a daily visitor in the two room flat on the third floor back. It was her intention to give Mrs. Harding a position in her household as soon as she recovered sufficiently.

In the meantime something happened which gave matters an unexpected twist.

Dr. Van Buren had spoken so often in glowing terms about the beautiful Gordon summer home that Josephine's curiosity was aroused. She asked her brother to take her with him on his next trip to "Oak Manor," and he readily consented.

It was a wonderful afternoon when the physician's car moved slowly over the winding path through the spacious grounds of the Gordon estate.

Josephine had told him to drive slowly so that she might be better able to observe all of Nature's wonders. Every now and then she uttered a little shriek of pure delight.

The big house, an imposing structure of granite, which stood surrounded by clusters of towering oaks, drew her attention at once. What interested her most was the tower in the rear. It inspired Josephine with awe and wonder

"That reminds me of some old English country place I read about," she declared. "That tower gives me a creepy feeling. It was such a tower as this in which English lords and baronets imprisoned their faithless wives and let them die of starvation.

Dr. Van Buren laughed.

"You must not let your imagination run away with you, sis," he answered. "I admit, that tower looks dark and forbidding. But this one holds no gruesome secret as you speak of."

"Perhaps it don't," said Josephine pessimistically. "But it might. You know the second Mrs. Gordon. She is not a saint by any means. She impresses me as a woman who would stop at nothing if her personal interests and safety were threatened. Suppose the first Mrs. Gordon should turn up some day.

"I dare say Alice would stop at nothing to hold her place. She would surely——"

"That is a frightful picture you are painting," the physician interrupted. "But such a thing can never come to pass. Poor Marie is dead."

"So far as we know, yes," his sister retorted. "But some mighty strange things have happened. People believed dead have come to life. Not long ago I read of just such a case in the newspapers."

"Nonsense," Dr. Van Buren exclaimed as he brought the car to a stop at the front entrance. "Don't waste your thoughts on a thing so utterly impossible. The first Mrs. Gordon will never return for the simple reason that it was proven that she lost her life in the Gary steel mill explosion.

"Well, here we are," he added, climbing out of the machine. "Do you want to take a walk through the grounds while I visit my patient?"

"I would love to if it is permissible," Josephine said.

"No question about that, my dear," he smiled. "Take a stroll, and if anyone of the servants object, just say that you are Dr. Van Buren's sister."

Josephine gave him a smile and watched until he disappeared through the door. There were several paths which led from the immense front terrace. She chose the one fringed on both sides with flowers and shrubbery.

This path led to a rustic bridge, spanning a narrow arm of the lake. For a moment she stood entranced.

She could not recall ever having seen anything more beautiful. Pure delight found expression in a gurgling cry. She wished for some food to give the swans that swam so gracefully on the placid water.

Josephine stood transfixed until she heard footsteps back of her. She turned swiftly to find herself face to face with the mistress of the Gordon home.

Continued in next number

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